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Liswarta river, and meander of the Warta river in the Działoszyn area are protected.

In the Silesian Voivodship there are 61 natural reserves³ with a total area of 3634.64 hectares, including, amongst others, forest and open water habitats, peat bogs and swamps as well as abiotic components of nature. Reserves have been established to protect various type of woodlands, such as riparian, beech, oak-hornbeam, pine, and spruce forests. In the Silesian Voivodship, in addition to the nature reserves and landscape parks there are 11 protected landscape areas⁴, 13 nature-landscape complexes⁵, 55 areas of ecological importance⁶, 1313 monuments of nature⁷ 3 documentation sites⁸, and one "Natura 2000" area: "the Upper Vistula Valley". Amongst the monuments of nature, the massive trees merit special attention: the 720-year old pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* (diameter trunk – 600cm) growing in Poręba near Zawiercie, the 620-year old pedunculate oak in the "Łęzczok" nature reserve near Racibórz (trunk diameter – 690cm) and the yews *Taxus baccata* in Bystra, that are more than 500 years old.

Despite centuries of human activity impacting on the natural environment in this area, the flora of the Silesian Voivodship is represented by more than 1500 species of vascular plants, amounting to nearly a half of all Poland's flora. In the Silesian Voivodship, the distribution limits of many species can be found; they do not occur outside these boundaries, and species rare and threatened in Poland are equally numerous here. In addition to the native species, there is a considerable proportion of alien species from various parts of the



Pine forest of the Cracow–Czestochowa Upland

world, which were introduced to the flora either intentionally (as cultivated plants) or accidentally. The fauna in this voivodship consists of 63 mammal species, 362 terrestrial bird species, 6 reptiles, 17 amphibians, several fish species and numerous invertebrates. Amongst the mammals the bison *Bison bonasus*, bred in the "Żubrowisko" reserve near Pszczyna is of particular interest.

More than four thousand historic and cultural objects located in the Silesian Voivodship are entered into the "register of monuments". These are mostly architectural landmarks: castles, palaces, mansions, churches, chapels, the urban arrangements of specific towns, cemeteries and historical parks.

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Regional nature conservation strategy

Preservation of the nature and landscape of the Silesian Voivodship requires application by local authorities of a consistent policy compliant with the concept of sustainable development throughout the region. The development and consistent implementation of 'the nature conservation strategy' is one of the top priorities in environmental protection, both at the voivodship and municipal levels.

The following goals are of the particular significance:

- maintenance and extension of the basic network of open spaces and their interconnections;



Spring in oak-hornbeam forest. "Łęzczok" nature reserve

- protection of rare and threatened habitats and associated flora, fauna, historical palaces and park complexes and cemeteries;
- providing information and education on nature conservation issues;
- raising awareness and promoting nature conservation;
- ensuring that all visitors have free access to wildlife and geological sites.

Modern nature conservation should take into account not only recognition of natural resources, and the determination of the most suitable methods of their protection and use, but also spatial and temporal links should be considered.

The national environmental policy tends to create an ecologically consistent system of protected areas. The idea of creating 'the Regional System of Protected Areas' was formulated several decades ago, initially, as the System of Protected Areas in the Katowice Voivodship. The concept of the system assumed that it would be a tool for internal environmental and cultural protection in this region, applied by local authorities to reinstate the ecological balance and maintain it permanently as well as to protect cultural values and tradition.

The protected areas system is aimed at guaranteeing the spatial continuity of open areas within voivodship boundaries (and outside), ensuring the possibilities of species migration in the whole area and protection of the regional gene pool. Proposed new pro-

tected areas of various status create genuine possibilities for filling gaps in the existing system and the establishment of continuous spatial links (ecological corridors, linking areas).

The impact of intensive mining activity on the natural environment is especially visible in the central part of the voivodship. In particular, it is applicable to mineral (raw material) mining which has contributed greatly to alteration of the land relief and has led to the exclusion of considerable agricultural and forested areas from use, thus devaluing the 'values' of the landscape. The restructuring and modernisation of industry inherited from the previous political system is one of the most pressing economic problems. The reinstatement of the natural and 'usable value' of areas destroyed by industrial activity is another urgent task. Areas which were previously used by industry, created as a result of human activity and often abandoned due to insufficient resources for reclamation, are often subject to spontaneous succession and they are interesting from a natural viewpoint. In many cases the creation of plant communities, locally uncommon, with a proportion of rare and protected plant and animal species was observed. In the Silesian Voivodship, many such post-industrial sites, have a documented historic and cultural heritage, and have also left a definite impression on this region.

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The sand extraction open pit "Szczakowa" in Jaworzno town. It is an example of human activity which causes major disturbances to the environment

